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SUBJECT: TAWAFUQ ON GOVERNMENT BOYCOTT, COR SPEAKER

(U) Classified by Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Sunni Tawafuq leader Ayad al-Samarrai termed the Tawafuq boycott of Council of Ministers meetings a proper response to the political provocation by PM Maliki of attempting to arrest the Sunni Minister of Culture. According to al-Samarrai an objective investigative committee should evaluate the charges while suspending the arrest warrant. Al-Samarrai believes the crisis with the Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mashadani could be resolved with his quick retirement, but it will be difficult to find a replacement. End Summary

Tawafuq,s Council of Ministers Boycott

¶2. (C) In a meeting with Poloffs on June 30, al-Samarrai strongly objected to the recent arrest warrant issued for Minister of Culture Al-Hashimi, saying that PM Maliki personally approved the arrest warrant despite evidence witnesses were coerced into making statements. Al-Samarrai believes an independent "trustworthy" legal committee should reexamine the evidence and witnesses, and allow the Minister to make his case. He pledged Tawafuq,s support for an indictment if the committee still found the case credible. Al-Samarrai said Tawafuq made this request to PM Maliki but received no response. Al-Samarrai claimed influential Shia ISCI parliamentarian Human Hammudi termed this request fair.

¶3. (C) Until this crisis was resolved, the Tawafuq ministers would continue to go to work but would not take part in Council of Ministers meetings.

Mashadani: Departure Easier than Replacement

¶4. (C) Al-Samarrai thought removing Council of Representatives (COR) Speaker Mashadani can be resolved quickly. The Speaker would be allowed to return for one day to preside. At the end of the day, the Speaker would announce his desire to retire and his departure would be accomplished with the appropriate dignity. Tawafuq opposed the retirement law proposed by Mashadani because it would make it too easy to remove future Speakers.

¶5. (C) With Mashadani gone, Tawafuq would want to name a replacement Speaker as quickly as possible, making compromise within the bloc easier, said al-Samarrai. He suggested that he or fellow Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) parliamentarian Osama Al-Tikriti could be suitable replacements but conceded that it was unlikely that Iraqi National Dialogue Council party leader Sheykh Khalaf Allyan would agree to an IIP nomination.

(Note: Under the Tawafuq party leader agreement, each of the three Sunni parties in Tawafuq has an equal voice even though the IIP has 27 of its 44 parliamentarians. The IIP nominated Vice President Tariq Al-Hashimi, Adnan Dulaymi,s Iraqi People,s Conference nominated Deputy Prime Minister Salam Al-Zubai, and INDC nominated Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani and

would likely demand the right to name his eventual replacement. End Note.)

¶6. (C) Al-Samarrai agreed that it would difficult for the other political blocs to agree to any other candidate from the remaining INDC parliamentarians and conceded that it would also be difficult to get Allyan to cede the decision to another Tawafuq party. Perhaps a non Tawafuq Sunni candidate would have to be found, he speculated.

¶7. (C) Poloff met on July 1 with Krikor Der-hagopian, VP Hashimi,s Foreign Relations Director, who said that the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) was considering CoR member Dhafer Nadhem Salman al-Ani as a possible replacement for Speaker Mashadani. Dhafer is from Adnan Dulaimi,s Iraqi People,s Conference. Proposing a name from outside VP Hashimi,s IIIP may make it easier for the Tawafuq leaders to agree. However, Dhafer is unlikely to meet with Shia support, since he was one of the Sunni CoR leaders charged by the government for having links to terrorists. The Higher Judicial Council allegedly included his name along with 10 others with a recommendation that their prosecutorial immunity be lifted. Dhafer,s home was raided in March 2007 by the ISF and a sniper rifle was found along with other weapons. Seven of his guards were arrested and later released.

¶8. (C) Comment: It is not likely that the removal of Speaker Mashadani will be as easy as al-Samarrai suggested, especially if the Tawafuq opposes his retirement law which includes a generous 30,000 USD per month pension. (Note: Under current rules, Mashadani is entitled to an 8,000 USD monthly pension. End note.) Mashadani wants salary and retirement parity for the Speaker,s position with that of the President. Agreement on a new Speaker will also be

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difficult, both within Tawafuq and with the other political blocs. Tawafuq leader VP Tariq Hashimi has in the past been unwilling to confront his coalition partners with tough choices. Barring the emergence of a good compromise candidate acceptable to Khalaf Allyan, the replacement of Speaker Mashadani may be long and difficult. End Comment.
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